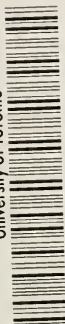


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# THE ART OF READING

BY

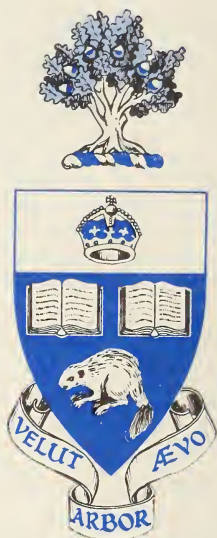
HENRY GUPPY, M.A., D.PH. ET LITT.

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Vol. 13, No. 1, January, 1929*

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# THE ART OF READING

BY

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“I love vast libraries ; yet there is a doubt  
If one be better with them or without,—  
Unless he use them wisely, and indeed,  
Knows the high art of what and how to read.  
At learning’s fountain it is sweet to drink,  
But ’tis a noble privilege to think ;  
And oft from books apart, the thirsting mind  
May make the nectar which it cannot find,  
’Tis well to borrow from the good and great,  
’Tis wise to learn ; ’tis godlike to create !”

JOHN GODFREY SAXE



## THE ART OF READING.<sup>1</sup>

THE written word and the ability to read and interpret it was always of mysterious significance to the uninitiated among the early and uncivilized races of people, because it carried meanings through distances in time and space in such an incomprehensible manner that they could not but fear and venerate it.

We recall even in comparatively modern times how Livingstone excited the wonder and awe of an African tribe as he daily perused a book which had survived the vicissitudes of travel through the dark continent. So incomprehensible to the natives was his performance with the book that they finally stole it and ate it, as the best way they knew of obtaining the white man's satisfaction from it.

This mystery of reading naturally led to a reverence for the book and also for the reader. The book became a fetich, and reading became a holy office performed by individuals possessing divine powers, who were regarded as next to the gods, and might even rule in their stead. Thus it came about that for a long time reading remained in the hands of the priesthood and of the church, with the result that learning and education have ever been more or less holy things.

When we come to consider the matter, it is not surprising that reading and the book should have excited the worshipful wonder of the ages, for real reading is the medium through which the purest feelings, the loftiest inspirations, and the highest ideals that have been allowed to mankind still come to us.

The written word and the power to interpret it are wonderful gifts, and yet, readers do not understand how they get their pages read. It is a marvellous process by which the thoughts and thought wanderings, the play of the innermost feelings, and desires, and will of one soul are reflected to another soul who reads them through his

<sup>1</sup> The substance of an address to the Manchester District Library Fellowship in the John Rylands Library, on the 19th October, 1928.

books. Just what we do with eye, and mind, and nerves when we read is a question the greatest scientist that ever lived is unable to answer, any more than he can tell us by what process the thought enters the brain. These are mysteries which are outside the ken of science and natural law, before which we can only bow in wondering awe.

Although there are certain questions that cannot be answered, there are many other questions which may be very profitably expounded. For example: we may ask what is the real purpose of books, and quite reasonably expect an answer. Comparatively few readers ever trouble to enquire what a book stands for, or what there is behind a book leading up to it, and yet these are questions to which every intelligent reader should be ready at once with an answer, for it is only in this way that we can appreciate the value and importance of our literary heritage, and come to realize at what a cost it has been obtained for us.

What, then, is the real purpose of books? Briefly stated: it is to satisfy the cravings for immortality which have never been absent from any human soul since the world began. If we pause for a moment and consider, we shall realize that we are not satisfied with our present life, we want to stretch it both backwards and forwards, to live in the past and in the future as well as in the present. We have been endowed with an innate longing to know what we are and how we became what we are. We want to know how the people in the far distant past lived, what they did, where they obtained their ideas of religion, where they learned their arts; and having acquired some knowledge of their life, and character, and achievement we desire to emulate their example, and in our turn we aspire to hand on our names and the memory of our deeds to those who shall come after us. These longings and aspirations have been satisfied mainly by books, indeed, they were originally the cause why books began to be made.

THE  
PURPOSE  
OF BOOKS.

To emphasize this point we need only reflect upon the condition of mind of the man or the woman who does not read. To them there is no past, for the ages before their own time are blank. Men and women have lived, and suffered, and died, but not for them. They know only what they see, and they see but imperfectly for want of instruction, and so they stumble along in a darkness that is of their



own making, because they are unmindful, perhaps unconscious, of the fact that human labour has constructed a great highway which bridges the ages, across which knowledge of the past comes to us, and across which we are able to hold intercourse with the great master minds of the past. That highway is composed of the books which constitute our literary heritage.

To put it in another way : The student of history tells us that the pillars of our modern world rest upon the labours of the past, that it is upon the wisdom of the past that governments, laws, and social systems are founded—that the spirits of the dead rule us from their shrines.

Therefore, if we are to make progress, we must have access to the mind and memory of the human race, and these are enshrined for us in the books which form the equipment of our libraries. Without books progress would be seriously retarded, and the process of invention would be both slow and tedious in the absence of the records of past achievements which lead up to invention.

But there is still higher ground from which reading may be viewed : Whatever our sphere in life may be we shall discharge our duties more wisely and more efficiently if we know books. The vision of wider horizons, the contact with greater minds, will bring us stronger and calmer to every duty. People will not say of us that we have ceased to grow. In the interchange of daily life we shall be more interesting and more welcome if we know books.

Not only so, but reading may be a source of consolation. There have been times in the lives of everyone of us, when we have been debarred from the satisfying fellowship of our kind, when there has been no brother or sister of the heart with whom we could take counsel on work and destiny, when we needed a city of the mind into which to retreat, a city where we could find true fellowship. At such times there is no more restful, no more soothing, no more purifying place of renewal than the city of books. There we may escape from the weight of care, and from the crowd of engagements into a realm of tranquillity, whence we shall return refreshed and inspired.

It may help us to understand something of the grandeur of this city, with its bountiful provision for the enrichment of life, if we look along the shelves of any library which is worthy of the name. There we shall find that the secular intervals of time are bridged, and that generations of men meet on a single shelf.

THE  
WORLD OF  
BOOKS.

Then, if we look more closely, we shall discover that all the leading facts of life are there, the differences between men and men, with all the differences between ages and ages of the world. If our minds are properly attuned we shall hear the laughter and the sobs of mankind, and we shall understand, as perhaps never before, something of the labours of mankind, of their successes, of their useless sacrifices of which there are so many in history, of the idle dreams with all their mischiefs, of the strong and steadfast efforts for good with all their blessings and their glories. Indeed, we shall find there the whole overwhelming dream of humanity, and we shall come away from such a scrutiny feeling the true pathos of humanity, with the mystery of time, more than in any other way.

At the same time we shall discern something of the power of books to annihilate space and time, and, like a magic carpet, transport us into regions the most remote. It is possible by their aid to witness unharmed the plague at Athens, or Florence, or London ; to accompany Cæsar on his marches ; to look in upon Cataline in council with his fellow-conspirators, or witness the signing of Magna Charta at Runnymede. It may be that opportunities of foreign travel and exploration have been denied to us, but through the medium of books we may rove the dark continent with Livingstone and Stanley, explore the sources of the Nile with Speke, penetrate to the shrine of Allah's Prophet at Mecca with Sir Richard Burton, accompany Nansen to the Frozen North, follow Captain Scott in his quest of the South Pole, or we may wander through Arabia with Doughty, or Lawrence, or Miss Bell, or Philby.

This world of books is our common heritage, but before we can enter into it we must gain possession of the key that unlocks it, and that key is the art of reading.

Now reading is an art that needs to be cultivated, for nobody cares for it to begin with. It is never too late to begin. It is true, however, that the great readers of the world began very early, and that what we read in early life impresses the mind much more deeply than what we read later. Nevertheless, a real love of reading may come late in life, although, in this, as in most other things, delays are dangerous, for an unused organ becomes atrophied, and a facility too long postponed is difficult if not impossible to be acquired. It is related of a man of

CULTIVA-  
TION OF  
READING

affairs, who had wanted all his life to read, and had collected a fine library for the time when he should have the leisure to enjoy it, that he found to his dismay, when the opportunity for which he had long waited came with his physician's order to take a year's rest from business, he could not read, because he had never learned how, and was unable to keep his mind fixed on the page. He had thought that a man could read just as easily as he could walk, but he discovered that it was an art, and with shame he had to confess that he had never cultivated it. The tools were within his reach but he could not use them.

If we wish to care for reading we must begin to read and go on reading until we really care for it. The first trials in any game are never pleasant. When we begin golf we are exasperated by our failures, but if we persevere we acquire some skill, and after that we go on. It is precisely the same in reading, if we begin by reading the things we like, within certain obvious limitations, and persevere in the practice, we shall gradually discover that we have formed the most pleasant of habits. In this, as in every other branch of art, the price of success is work. People who expect to be able to read must serve an apprenticeship, and that entails work.

To read all the books that have been written, and to keep pace with those that are being written, is clearly impossible, and therefore as Aristotle would say "about what is SELECTION. impossible one does not argue."

Life being the length it is, and time and opportunity being so brief, we must make selection from the enormous mass of printed matter which confronts us. Even the ripest scholar is puzzled to decide what books to read among the myriads that clamour for his attention. If in Bacon's time some books were to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested, how much greater must be the need of discrimination and guidance to-day if we are to make the most of our time, and fortunately such guidance is now readily available.

Some fifty years ago the "Pall Mall Gazette" made an effort to solve the riddle by inviting a number of eminent men to compile lists of the hundred best books.

We may very reasonably ask "Under what conditions is a book a best book?" It depends upon our mood. There are moods in



which we prefer "Pickwick" to "The Golden Bough" or "The Rig Veda," and find that it does us much more good. There is little doubt that if any man honestly set himself to read the hundred best books in any list right through he would become so satiated as never to wish to read another volume. The best literature for everybody is that which they can best assimilate. No intellectual stomach will digest everything. It is better to read twenty books twice than to have read the so-called hundred best books once.

But the "Pall Mall Gazette" like "Everyman" was in search of masterpieces, and our trust will in the end repose in masterpieces, those great classics which in any language are neither numerous nor difficult to detect, nor forbidding by reason of their difficulty.

Our true classic is not only universal but permanent. Whilst bearing the imprint of the times and of the personality of its writer, it remains significant or acquires a new significance after the age for which it was written, and the conditions under which it was written have passed away, and yet it remains undefaced by handling. In other words: the classic is superior to the ebb and flow of popular fancy and critical opinion, and refuses to die.

This, however, must be said, that it is a great mistake to toil through masterpieces without caring for them or understanding them, and in doing so to feel that we have done a virtuous act when we have completed it. To understand and appreciate masterpieces we have to be educated into the appreciation of what is supremely good. No one has more than a certain stock of receptiveness given him by the Almighty, and if that is already exhausted by the newspaper and the ephemeral in literature, what time have we left to give to the Dantes, the Petrarchs, and the Shakespeares?

We cannot altogether dispense with the reading of newspapers, for they are necessary to us if we are to keep in touch with the world movements; but we must not allow this engrossing form of literature so to monopolize our time as to cause us to neglect the higher forms. What we should strive to do is to keep our hearts and brains close to the great hearts and brains of the past. Labruyère, in one of his "Caractères" speaks thus: "When what you read elevates your mind and fills you with noble aspirations look for no other rule by which to judge your book. It is good and is the work of a master mind."

When we begin to read we should read slowly and deliberately, just as a pedestrian setting out on a long journey starts at a moderate pace, quickening it as his muscles get into full play, and as his limbs become accustomed to the exercise. This suggestion may not be favourable to rapid reading, but it will ensure thorough reading. It is not the multitude of books that gives wisdom, it is not how much we read that should concern us, but how much we retain. It is better to master a dozen books completely than to dash through a hundred in the common fashion, which resembles closely the case of the tourist who hurries through the finest scenery in an express train without detecting any of its remarkable features.

But those dozen books should be literature. It is needless to say that not all books are literature. We should all agree <sup>LITERA-</sup> as to the place which should be assigned to a railway <sup>TURE.</sup> guide, a cookery book, "Paradise Lost," or "Pilgrim's Progress," but there is a border country which may be described as the region of uncertainty. Charles Lamb, half-humorously it is true, narrowed the conception of literature to such an extent as to exclude the works of Hume, Gibbon, and Josephus, together with directories, almanacs, and draught-boards bound and lettered as books. Few of us would care to adopt Lamb's view, but this question of delimitation is one to which, as yet, no final answer has been given.

For our purpose we shall get an idea of literature sufficiently broad and accurate if we lay stress upon two considerations. In the first place literature is composed of those books, and those books only, which by reason of their subject matter and their mode of treating it are of great human interest, and in which, in the second place, the element of form and the pleasure which form gives are to be regarded as essential.

A piece of literature differs from a specialized treatise on astronomy, or on political economy, or philosophy, or even history, in part, because it appeals not to a particular class of readers only, but to men and women as men and women ; and in part because while the treatise is simply to impart knowledge, one ideal end of the piece of literature, whether it also imparts knowledge or not, is to yield æsthetic satisfaction by the manner in which it handles it. We care for literature primarily on account of its deep and lasting human significance. A great book grows directly out of life, and in reading it we are brought



into large, close, and fresh relations with life, and in that fact lies the final explanation of its power. Fundamentally, literature is an expression of life through the medium of language, and it lives by virtue of the life which it embodies. It has been described as the loom upon which the threads of history are woven into pictures.

Therefore, it is in life that we have to seek the sources of literature, or the impulses which have given birth to the various forms of literary expression. The great impulses behind literature may be described as : the desire for self-expression ; interest in people and their doings ; interest in the world of reality in which we live, and in the world of imagination which we conjure into existence ; and our love of form as form.

Man is a social being possessing social instincts, and by the constitution of his nature he is unable to keep his experiences, his observations, his emotions, and his fancies to himself. He desires to impart them to those about him, and the channels of expression which he has opened up constitute the various forms of literature. At bottom literature is an interpretation of life as life shapes itself in the mind of the interpreter. The mirror which the writer holds up to the world about him is of necessity the mirror of his own personality. His book is born of his brain and his heart. He has put himself into its pages so that they partake of his life and are instinct with his individuality, which is not necessarily of an aggressive domineering egoism, for often it is of a gracious and impelling charm, as in the case of St. Augustine, Thomas à Kempis, Pascal, Dante, Bunyan, William Law, and their kindred.

Therefore, it is with the interpreter first that we have to do. It is to the man in the book, to begin with, that we have to find our way. We must get to know him as an individual and establish personal intercourse with him.

A great book owes its greatness to the greatness of the personality which gave it life. What we call genius is only another name for freshness and originality of outlook upon the world of thought. The book is a great book in that it has something fresh and original to say, and that it says it in a fresh and original way. It is the utterance of one who has himself been close to those aspects of life of which he speaks, and who has the artist's wonderful faculty of making us see and feel with him. Milton expresses the idea

GREAT  
BOOKS.

very beautifully when he says : "A good book is the precious life blood of a master spirit embalmed and treasured up for a life beyond life." The preliminary step to all profitable reading is to throw open our whole nature to the quickening influence of such a master spirit, and allow his life blood to flow freely through our veins. Carlyle urges us to distinguish between the genuine voices and the mere echoes, between the men who speak for themselves, and those who speak only on the report of others. What does he mean ? Charlotte Brontë had caught Carlyle's meaning when she wrote of George Henry Lewes's "Ranthorpe," that she had read a new book, not a reprint, not a reflection of any other book, but a new book.

If we are to establish the intercourse between the author and ourselves, to which reference has been made already, we must listen attentively to what he has to tell us, and do our best to enter sympathetically into his thought and feeling. We must note carefully how he looked at life, what he found in it, and what he brought away from it. We must observe how the world of experience impressed him, and how it is interpreted through his personality. In this way we get to know the man as the man reveals himself in what he has written.

The relations between literature and life are very vital. It is by means of this personal intercourse that we are made partakers of a life which is larger, richer, and more varied than we ourselves can ever know of our own individual knowledge, and it does that because it carries us beyond the pinched, meagre humanity of our every day round of existence into contact with the fresh, strong, and magnetic personalities, who have enshrined themselves in the world's great books.

Taking this as the point of departure, we must in the next place make our reading broad and sympathetic. The essential difference between the mere reader and the student of literature is that one reads in a haphazard desultory way, whilst the other organizes his reading to some regularly ordered plan. So long as we take simply a book here and a book there as chance or the whim of the hour may dictate, we are merely readers ; it is only when we introduce method into our reading that we become students.

It is obvious, therefore, that our natural course is to pass from the reading of books to the study of authors. Our first aim must be to establish personal relations with the man in his work. We must consider his writings not as isolated productions, but in their relation

READER  
OR  
STUDENT.

with one another as an organic whole, and with the man himself, with the growth of his mind, with the changes of his temper and thought, and the influence upon him of his experiences in the world.

Take Shakespeare as an illustration. We may read and often do read Shakespeare's plays without the slightest idea of sequence of method, jumping from the "Comedy of Errors," to "King Lear," and from the "Tempest" back to "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and no one can deny the delight and profit to be derived from such random reading. But though we may get to know much of Shakespeare in that way there is much we cannot know. We have still to study these plays as diverse expressions of one and the same genius, to compare and contrast them in matter and spirit, in form and style, to conceive them as products of a single individual power revealing itself at different periods in curiously varying moods, now in one, now in another of them.

That explains the reason for introducing system into our reading. Recognizing this necessity, the best course to pursue is to study a writer's works in the order of their production. The works then become a luminous record of his inner life and craftsmanship, and we are able to follow in them the various phases of his experience, the stages of his mental growth, and the changes undergone by his art. Only in this way can we obtain a substantial sense of the progressive revelation of Shakespeare's genius and power. And what applies to Shakespeare will hold equally good in the case of every other writer who is worthy of systematic study.

When we suggest that an author's works should be studied in the order of their production we do not mean literally everything he has written, but simply everything which is really vital and important as an expression of his genius. There is a mania to-day for collecting and preserving every scrap which any great author allowed to remain unpublished, the chips from his workshop, which have been gleaned from his note-books, even from his waste-paper basket. Most writers leave behind them a considerable body of unpublished work, which is either tentative or experimental, and adds nothing to the sum total of their real contributions to the world's literature. This may be of value to the research student intent upon an exhaustive investigation of a given author, but to begin with we may safely disregard it.

By this method of studying an author's works in the order of their



production we shall find ourselves constantly comparing and contrasting a man with himself, and later with others who worked in the same field, who dealt with the same problems, who wrote under similar conditions, or, who, for any other reason are naturally associated with him in our minds. And as we enter more and more into our reading we shall find this comparative study growing upon us until it becomes second nature.

The student of Shakespeare inevitably turns to the contemporaries of the Master, to men like Marlowe, Green, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Webster, and marks the points of resemblance as well as the points of difference. He also turns to the other men who prepared the ground for Shakespeare, and made it possible for him to produce the works which have immortalized his name, and in so doing he realizes the essential qualities of Shakespeare's genius and art.

We throw a flood of new light upon Tennyson and Browning when we read them side by side. Thackeray furnishes us with an illuminating commentary on Dickens, and Dickens performs the same service for Thackeray.

Only in this way can we enter into the spirit of our author and penetrate into the vital forces of his personality. That was how Petrarch entered into that close and intimate relationship with Vergil, and Cicero, and Horace, and Homer. These great classical writers were not mysteriously distant and supernatural beings, they were friends, and friends to whom from time to time, as he entered into their spirit and became better acquainted with their writings, Petrarch wrote letters telling them how they had enriched his life, not hesitating to point out to them the inconsistencies between their teaching, and their lives, and the disappointments and pain these defects had caused him. That is entering into the spirit of our author! That is what George Gilfillan meant when he said: "Do not slavishly mumble the words of your author, and cry 'Amen' to his every conclusion, but read him with suspicion, with inquiry, with a free exercise of your own mental faculties, with the admiration of intelligence, and not with the wonder of ignorance."

As soon as our interest in the writings of any great writer has been awakened we shall wish to know something of the BIO.  
man himself, as a man, beyond that which his work GRAPHY.  
reveals. We shall be curious to see him in his daily conversation

with his fellows, to learn something of his ambitions, his struggles, his successes, and the connection of his book with these. Only in this way shall we be able to understand his point of view.

Matthew Arnold and Saintsbury both protest against the introduction of much biographical matter into critical estimates, and it is true that too much or too intrusive a knowledge of a man's life may withdraw our attention from the essential qualities of his work. Saintsbury defines the author's position thus: "This I have done for the public, judge this, I did not pretend to offer my life for your criticism but only such of it as I have put into my book." And perhaps it is more just, at any rate it is more generous, to judge a man's life by his work than to judge his book by his life.

It remains to be said, however, that to a considerable extent the charm of all literature resides largely in the personality of the author, that indefinable quality, or rather combination of qualities by virtue of which he was himself differentiated from every other being. Any good and great book makes one feel that. By acquainting ourselves with the deciding facts of an author's life we deepen our sense of his individuality. Indeed, we shall understand his work better if we can put ourselves to some degree in his place.

Sir Walter Scott was a man who never was his own hero. He never worked up his own history into literary shape, he never had anything to say of his own feelings or circumstances. And yet we enter more thoroughly into the spirit both of his poetry and his fiction after we have become familiar with his life.

If that is true of Scott how much more true it is of such authors as Samuel Johnson and Charles Lamb. The work of such an author as Lamb is, in fact, all autobiography and nothing else. He is telling us of himself. His own personality is the whole subject of his work. Our appreciation of him is doubled when we come to be familiarly acquainted with the facts of his life.

Therefore, side by side upon the shelf with the books of any author we really care for a place should be made for some well-chosen account of his life. The youth of an author frequently offers the richest field for enquiry into the influences moulding his genius and the illusive process of its growth. Take, for example, Mrs. Hardy's "Early life of Thomas Hardy," it is the stuff of Hardy's life. We should not, however, allow ourselves to be carried away by the craze for mere personal detail which has developed so much



of late. There is no reason why we should entangle ourselves in the mass of controversial literature of the kind which deals with the Carlyle's home life and domestic relations. These details add nothing of real significance to the essential personality and character of the author of "Sartor Resartus" and "Past and Present"; it is with Carlyle as the great prophet and literary artist that we ought to be concerned. Sometimes a seemingly insignificant fact will prove to be unexpectedly illuminating and suggestive. On the other hand, phases of a man's career important and interesting in themselves will turn out upon examination to have so little to do with his work that on the literary side they will mean nothing. Much will depend upon the particular instance. In the case of Dante and Goethe their writings can hardly be understood when detached from their life. Goethe's works according to his own description of them, are but fragments of a great personal confession. No hard and fast rule can be laid down. We must guard against confusing the means with the end to be obtained. This, however, must be said, biography in itself is always interesting and generally profitable, but the study of biography is not the study of literature, and should never be made a substitute for it.

It is highly desirable that in our reading we should cultivate the spirit of sympathy with our author. We cannot expect SYMPATHY. our personal relations with all the great writers we may take up to be uniformly intimate and agreeable. Our own temperament has to be reckoned with. Literature contains many different personalities and we sometimes have our own marked leanings and antipathies. Honest likes and dislikes are never to be despised. No critic has a right to impose his own judgment upon us, and to condemn us as hopelessly lacking in taste because we cannot enjoy or admire this or that book. We must remember, however, that many authors should prove interesting even when, and occasionally because, they are intellectual and moral aliens to us. We must also remember that contact with many different kinds of personality, which often challenge our own, increases the flexibility of our mind, the breadth of our outlook, the catholicity of our tastes and of our judgment. In that way the value of literature as a means of culture becomes great. It is necessary, therefore, to exercise a certain amount of patience in our dealings with writers who at first rather repel than attract. The fault may be entirely with ourselves, in prejudices which we should strive to overcome, in mere inability to

place ourselves at their point of view, or even to rise to the level of their thought and power.

The best method of guarding against the danger of reading what is useless is to read only what is interesting. Many people read a book principally with the object of getting <sup>USELESS</sup> through it. They reach the word "Finis" with the <sup>READING.</sup> same sensation of triumph as an Indian feels when he adds a fresh scalp to his girdle. To begin a volume and not to finish it would be to deprive themselves of the satisfaction of having marked some definite step in the weary path of self-improvement, to lose all the reward of their self-denial. To skip according to their literary code is a species of cheating, but this is quite wrong. We have only half-learned the art of reading until we have added to it the even more refined accomplishment of skipping and skimming.

Professor Cavanagh, the psychologist, has made some interesting observations on the subject of the pace at which we read. <sup>RAPID</sup> He remarks that many, perhaps most, people read too <sup>READING.</sup> slowly, and could by a conscious effort speed up their reading by something like fifty per cent., and paradoxical as it may appear quicker reading is more efficient. Apart from mere skimming the quick reader understands and remembers better than the slow reader. In this, as in many other cases, modern psychology has shown the old adage "slow and sure" to be a fallacy. Quick reading leads to alertness of mind. By increasing the speed we shall very likely remember more easily what we have read. Tests have been made and have shown that the quickest readers are best at answering questions on the subject-matter of their reading.

There is just one note of warning that may be struck here. It is that we must not imagine we know books simply by reading about them. We must read them for ourselves. There is a passage in Richard Moulton's "Literary History of the Bible" which is very much to the point. He strikes a warning note in the following passage: "We have done everything with the Bible, we have overlaid it with commentaries, we have translated it, revised the translations, quarrelled over the revisions, discussed authenticity, inspiration, and textual history, epitomized it, extracted lessons from it; and yet there remains one thing left to be done, that is: simply to read it." And what applies to the Bible applies equally to every great book that ever was written.

To read a book a single time is but to savour it. Every good book will seem better at the second reading than at the first. It is not until the second or the third reading that we begin to acquire a sense of the book's perspective, and of the relative importance of its parts. Then it is that the excellencies of it begin to gain emphasis, and the notable passages begin to lodge themselves in the memory. The man or the woman who reads for love does not trouble whether they have read a book once or twice or twenty times.

In conclusion, we venture to recall and to commend a very helpful practice which, to a considerable extent, has fallen into disuse. We refer to the practice of reading aloud.

READING  
ALLOUD.

There is no finer aid to the charm and music which resides in literature in its various forms than this practice, which is as old as literature itself. The art of printing has done much to dull our literary perception. Words have a double value : that which resides in the sense, and that which resides in the sound. We miss much of the charm if the eye is made to do duty also for the ear, for the words bereft of their vocal force are but half alive on the printed page. The music of poetry when repeated only to the inward ear comes merely as a faint echo. If poetry is musical speech, if it owes much of its beauty, its magic, its peculiar power of stirring the feelings, and of arousing the imagination, to its verbal felicity, and its varied melodies of metre and rhyme, then its full significance as poetry can be appreciated only when it addresses us through the ear. The silent perusal of the printed page will leave one of its principal secrets unsurprised.

It is a fact but little remembered to-day that throughout the Greek period and far into the days of the Roman empire, down to the third and fourth centuries of our own era, the custom survived of reading both prose and poetry not silently but aloud and in company. Indeed, before literature had entered into partnership with commerce, when she was cultivated for her own sake, the publication of a piece of literature consisted in its being read by the author to an assembled company of invited guests, whose approval or disapproval decided the fate of the work.

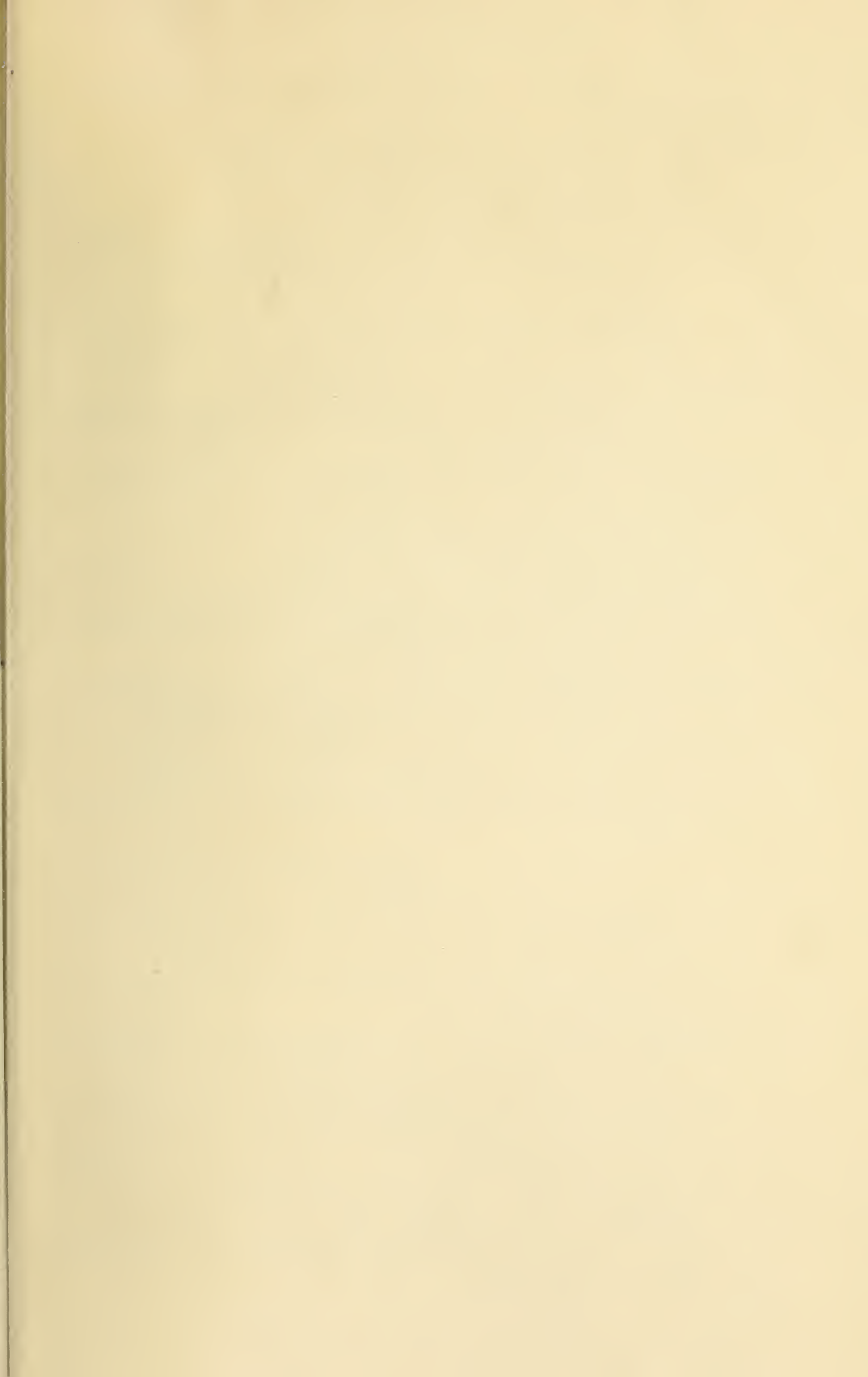
Another great advantage which this practice of reading aloud possesses, is that it will preserve us from the wandering mind, because the sound of the voice keeps the mind alert and fixed upon the subject with which we are engaged.



Therefore, we should make it a practice to read aloud. We should start off by reading at the long breath, and as persuasively as possible. We should not, at first, pause to indicate some particular beauty by repeating the line before we proceed; we should read straight through to the end, and then recur to particular beauties. In that way we shall allow our author, whether it be Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, Bunyan, Tennyson, Browning, or Masfield to have their own way, and as a result we shall find that we have gained a new revelation of the writer's personality. At the same time we shall have discovered that the golden key of the voice enables us to unlock the inner shrines of literature.

One other suggestion we venture to offer to readers. It is that when we are making acquaintance for the first time with a piece of literature, we should not, to begin with, trouble about reading notes, or comments, or even pictures, we should even ignore what at first we do not understand. If we desire to form our own independent opinion of the work we have taken up we should avoid an illustrated edition, otherwise our opinions will be influenced by the artist's interpretation of the text. We should form our own mental pictures by allowing our imagination to have full play. There are persons who seem to walk through life with their eyes open yet seeing nothing, and there are others who read through books, even cram their minds with facts, without carrying away any living picture of significant story which might arouse their fancy in an hour of leisure, or gird them with endurance in a moment of difficulty.

Therefore, when we have been reading a poem, a play, a novel, or a chapter of some notable work, perhaps at the close of the day, we should lay down our book, lean back in our chair, close our eyes, and ask ourselves what we see in the glowing gallery of our mind. If instead of the word picture we found on the cold grey page of the printed volume, we find upon the canvas of our brain a picture which is full of colour and pulsating with life we may claim to have made our own that which we had been reading. That is what Russell Lowell meant when he said: "think not you know a fact of history when you know that it took place, only when you see it as it actually did take place." In other words: take the dry bones of history, and by the help of the imagination clothe them with flesh and blood and make them pulsate with life.





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